



Disaster and Emergency Management Resources

Fire Prevention and Safety on the Farm

Before a Fire on the Farm

- Get proper fire insurance coverage for your livestock, buildings, and equipment.
- Keep all ignition sources away from combustible material in and around your farm buildings.
- Develop and carry out a fire safety inspection for animal buildings and other buildings. Follow a routine preventive maintenance schedule and checklist for fire hazards.
- Conduct regular fire drills, so all family members and employees know what they should do.
- Test your fire or smoke alarm system at least once a year.
- Make sure that power needs for ventilation, feed distribution, and other functions are met without overloading your electrical system.
- Inspect all wiring and electric motors and appliances for exposed wires, broken insulation, improper grounding, and improper installation. Equip motors with thermal overload relays or cutouts.
- Check the heating system to make certain that every furnace or stove is in good repair. See that ducts and air shafts are clean of dust and debris, motors are cleaned and oiled (if necessary) each season, and pulley belts are in good working order. Check gas and fuel oil systems for leaks and unsafe installations.
- Strictly enforce a “no smoking” rule inside any buildings or areas where flammable and combustible materials are stored.
- Be extremely careful when handling gasoline. It is flammable and explosive. If your clothing becomes contaminated with a flammable material, change immediately. Never refuel gasoline engines while they are running or hot.
- Keep flammable liquids in labeled safety containers and store them in approved flammable-liquid safety cabinets.
- Keep aboveground fuel storage tanks at least 40 feet from buildings.
- Select and provide proper fire extinguishers. Always make sure the unit on the wall matches the type of fires that could develop in that area. There are different types of extinguishers for different kinds of fires. If you use the wrong unit on a fast-moving fire, you may cause the fire to spread even faster.

- Read the extinguisher's instructions to learn how to use the extinguisher before a fire ever starts. Make sure all extinguishers are serviced, maintained, and tagged at intervals, not to exceed one year.

During a Fire on the Farm

- If a fire occurs, make sure that you, your family members, and employees are safe. Call the fire department immediately and let the experts take control.
- When calling the fire department, be prepared to give accurate and complete information, including:
 - The exact location of your farm.
 - The extent and location of the fire.
 - The color of smoke coming from the burning structure(s).
 - Anything else the dispatcher requests. Stay on the line until the dispatcher is through collecting all the necessary information.
- Make sure the fire department has complete access to the blaze. Do not let vehicles, livestock, or people block the driveway or access to buildings.
- Alert firefighters to potential hazards, including pesticide and chemical storage areas and fuel tanks.
- When your farmstead is burning, firefighting crews may ask you which building to save first, second, third, etc. Ask yourself if it is more important to save livestock, machinery, or feed. If a livestock building is on fire, animals may already have been exposed to deadly heat, smoke, and gases. It may be safer and more realistic to save an adjacent building or vehicles stored inside it.
- In addition to danger from the fire itself, hazardous materials can be released during a fire, including smoke and toxins. Smoke inhalation and heat are leading causes of death among both animals and people.
- During a fire, animals may refuse to leave the building. Cows and horses tend to panic if they are frightened or forced to use a secondary exit. In some cases, evacuated animals run back into burning buildings. Some farmers have had luck leading a few panicked animals out by throwing a gunnysack over their heads.
- If you are able to evacuate animals, be sure you are not leading them toward a dead-end, such as a gate that won't open outward.
- Containment may be the best answer. Oxygen fuels a fire. Sometimes, it is best to close the doors and wait for the fire department. Poultry buildings, especially, are prone to flash fires because of their construction and the large amounts of dust inside. If you open the door, a burning poultry building is likely to burst into flames.
- If hay is slowly smoldering in an upper level of a barn or silo, call the fire department and, if possible, begin evacuation. This is one instance where you may have enough time for a quiet, orderly evacuation. DO NOT try to throw smoldering hay out a window or door; exposure to oxygen fuels a blaze.

After a Fire on the Farm

- Hazards may still exist after firefighters leave the scene of a farm fire. Contaminated water runoff and hazardous debris are two of the most common challenges for farmers during cleanup efforts.
- When water used in firefighting mixes with pesticides, fuels, or other hazardous materials, the result is a harmful runoff. It poses an immediate threat to groundwater (including your wells), surface water, humans, animals, and the environment. By law, appropriate steps must be taken for containment and cleanup.
 - If hazardous materials have been released in the course of firefighting, local and state authorities must be notified and consulted for legal cleanup methods. Immediately contact your Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC).
 - In some cases, the fire department may help build dikes or ditches to help contain water runoff until local emergency response teams (hazardous materials specialists) arrive. In other cases, emergency response teams will be called in to contain and clean up the spill.
 - Wear protective gear if you must enter a contaminated area, such as a flooded pesticide storage room. Keep livestock away from contaminated waters. Place warning signs on contaminated areas and/or fence them off so that livestock, children, or others aren't accidentally exposed.
- Before beginning cleanup, take photographs or make a videotape of damage. This will be helpful for insurance records and/or income tax loss deductions. Also, have an insurance adjuster inspect the premises. Based on insurance reimbursement and advice from a building inspector or contractor, make decisions about whether to rebuild or restore existing structures.

Adapted from resource material developed by the University of Florida Extension Service entitled "The Disaster Handbook"